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DEPARTMENTAL CONFERENCES.

ENGLISH.

The English Conference was devoted to the discussion of the report of the Committee on Entrance Requirements in English which had presented its report on Friday to the Executive Conference of Deans and Principals. This report was as follows:

In view of the following facts: (*a*) that the University of Chicago gives less credit for English than the large majority of American colleges; (*b*) that nearly all of the schools affiliated or co-operating with the University require at least three full years of work in English, and in many cases four years; (*c*) that the course of study in English in the larger and better schools has come to have the definiteness and seriousness of courses in other subjects, with increased efficiency in results obtained (as shown in the work of students in the Junior Colleges)—therefore the committee recommends:

1. That three units of credit be allowed for English to graduates of schools where at least three full years of English form a part of the curriculum.

2. That the three units of credit be distributed as follows: Elementary Composition (including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the reading of English classics in what is known as the "general list")—*one unit*; Literature—the study of the English classics (what is commonly known as the list for "intensive reading"), and an outline of the chief periods of the history of English literature, following the classics studied—*one unit*; Composition and Rhetoric (including the subjects of sentence formation, paragraph structure, kinds of composition, diction, usage—namely, such topics as are covered by standard modern text-books, such as Carpenter, *Elements of Rhetoric*; Herrick and Damon, *Composition and Rhetoric for Schools*; Lewis, *Second Manual of Composition*; Scott and Denny, *Composition-Rhetoric*; or any text of similar grade)—*one unit*.

It is understood that the three units represent approximately one-half work in English literature, and one-half in rhetoric and English composition. Further, it is understood that the division of the units by topics does not imply a corresponding division in the teaching of the subject, or a corresponding order in their treatment of the various topics included in English.

ROBERT HERRICK, *Chairman*; NOTT FLINT, E. H. LEWIS, ELEANOR QUINN, in attendance and approving this report.

In discussion of this report Professor E. H. Lewis, of Lewis Institute, presented the following paper :

TIME REQUIREMENTS IN THE ENGLISH UNITS.

Time requirements in the English units is the subject first before us. It has been recommended to the University to allow a total of three entrance units for English, and the work has roughly been outlined by the Committee of Five. The committee rather assumed that you would be glad of the extra credit. But what is an entrance unit? The University defines it as "not less than 150 hours of prepared work." We know very well that the spirit of the University is to ask for powers rather than for hours. But it seems inconsistent to specify hours of recitation without specifying hours of preparation. In one academy known to you all a first-year student is required to spend 100 minutes daily on his English; in another, only 30 minutes. In the one academy he carries three subjects; in the other, four. It is clear that a third of the student's time is more valuable than a fourth, perhaps more valuable even than the ratio of three to four would indicate.

I should be glad to see the definition of the unit completed, and completed in terms of hours. And it would be an important addition to education as a science if competent medical advice were taken as to how much work—not reverie, but intense application—may be required with propriety of the average boy of fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. It is extremely easy to dismiss this whole topic with vague references to the varying nervous power of students. But the requirements of 150 hours of recitation and 15 units for admission are not vague; they are so definite that they imply a definite conviction as to what a boy can do. There are university men who believe that an average boy of fifteen can give intense attention to books for eight or nine hours a day. Personally I do not believe that he can do so without injuring his health. Also, in the case of boys who have been forced through a preparatory course of four years, giving eight hours a day to books, I think I see a certain intellectual rawness; an inability to reason and ponder; a mental weariness

which precludes much traveling out of the beaten paths of memory. At all events, it is a mistake to suppose that these questions can be dismissed by educators, however weary educators may be from their own multifarious mental exertions.

I think the "average" boy needs three full years—not less than thirty weeks each year—and two hours a day of study, counting preparation and recitation, in order to meet the entrance requirements in English. Whether you can get that two hours a day is a question. Your pupils who go to college must present fifteen units for admission.

In any case, I hope we shall not feel free to sacrifice spelling and correct oral usage. There is in the air a spirit of foolish skepticism as to these subjects. They tell us that good spellers are born, not made. They tell us that the influence of home and street will make some of our students ungrammatical to the end of the chapter. This spirit must either be resisted or we must resign the name of teachers of English. Teachers of literature we may be, if we fail to resist, but surely not teachers of English.

Let us suppose that on a given day you had to choose between two tasks. Let one be that of curing a youth of saying, "I would have went"—an expression that I heard yesterday from the lips of a man in college. The task would be hard; it would require ingenuity in devising drill-exercises that would set up a new habit, and it would require patience in execution. No one day would be enough. Let the other task be to teach the same youth the moral significance of that passage in *Macbeth* which concerns the cure of a mind diseased. You remember the passage. It is a noble and solemn one, and it lays bare the secret of the human will, the responsibility of the will to govern even thought. Few single passages in Shakespeare would be of so great and so permanent value to the youth as this. By the hypothesis, time is lacking for both tasks. I am clear in my own mind that it would be the teacher's duty to give the drill. If we were ingenious enough to turn the passage to some account, and make the patient feel the need of ministering to himself, so much the better. There would be a great sacrifice at best; and yet I think it ought to be made, if necessary.

So great a sacrifice need not, in most schools, ever be made. But lesser ones will have to be made, if our students are to spell correctly and talk grammatically. I have in my pocket proofs that a considerable proportion of Chicago students who go to college are unable to spell with certainty such words as *riding*, *hoping*, *sloping*, and *shamming*. I am ashamed to mention this fact, for it strikes home to my own department.

We are a body of teachers who have assumed great responsibilities; we are confronted by numerous and confusing duties. Let us do what we can to simplify our task. We may as well abandon the vain hope that teachers in other departments are going to devote much attention to spelling and oral usage. They will do something, will do more and more in the best schools. But they will not eradicate long-established habits. In the present condition of things, to do that is very definitely one of our tasks.